

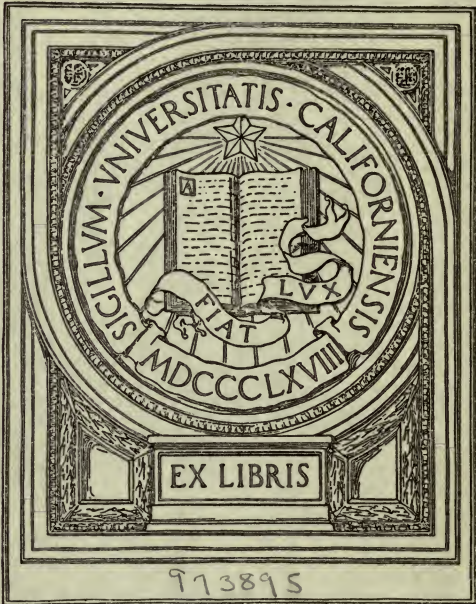
NOTHING
TO WEAR.



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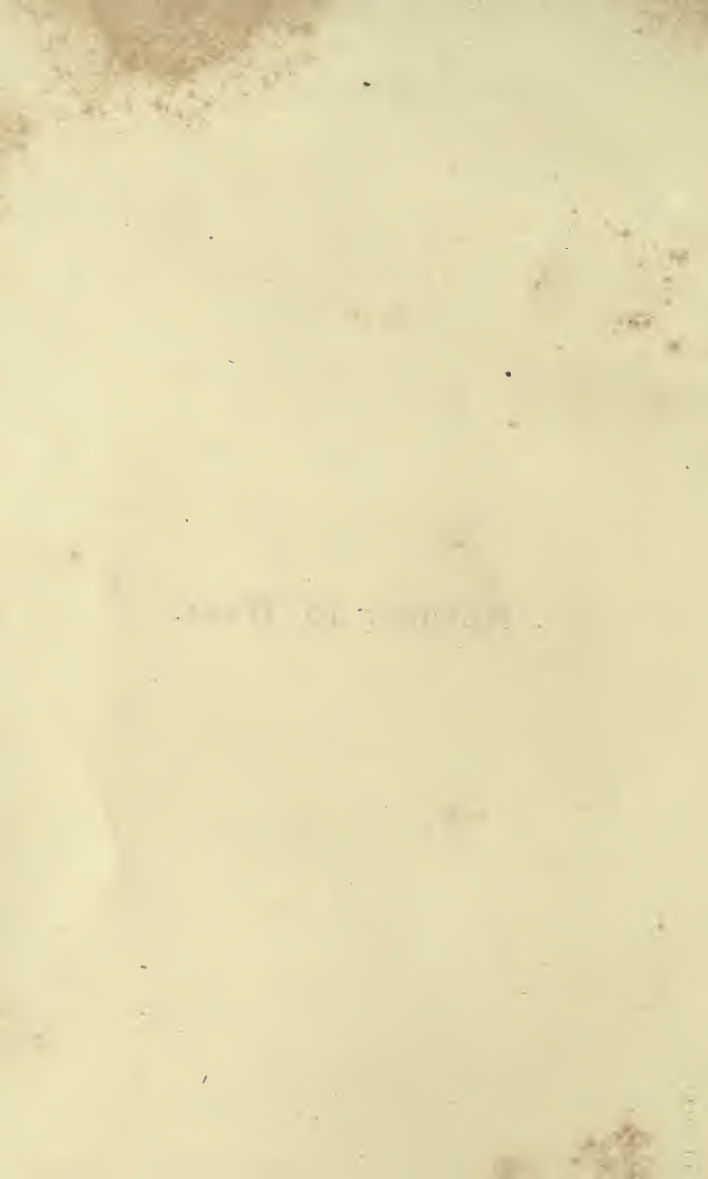
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NOTHING TO WEAR.





NOTHING TO WEAR:

An Episode of City Life.

Butler, William Allen

(FROM HARPERS WEEKLY.)

Illustrated by Hoppin.

NEW YORK:
RUDD & CARLETON, 310 BROADWAY.

MDCCCLVII.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT

1950

RESEARCH REPORT

NO. 10

BY

ROBERT H. COHEN

NOTHING TO WEAR.

AN EPISODE OF CITY LIFE.

MISS FLORA M'FLIMSEY, of Madison Square,

Has made three separate journeys to Paris,

And her father assures me, each time she was there,

That she and her friend Mrs. Harris

(Not the lady whose name is so famous
in history,

But plain Mrs. H., without romance or
mystery)

Spent six consecutive weeks without stop-
ping,

In one continuous round of shopping;

Shopping alone, and shopping together,

At all hours of the day, and in all sorts
of weather;

For all manner of things that a woman
can put

On the crown of her head or the sole
of her foot,

Nothing to Wear. 9

Or wrap round her shoulders, or fit round
her waist,

Or that can be sewed on, or pinned on,
or laced,

Or tied on with a string, or stitched on
with a bow,

In front or behind, above or below:

For bonnets, mantillas, capes, collars, and
shawls;

Dresses for breakfasts, and dinners, and
balls;

Dresses to sit in, and stand in, and walk in;

Dresses to dance in, and flirt in, and
talk in;

10 Nothing to Wear.

Dresses in which to do nothing at all;

Dresses for winter, spring, summer, and
fall;

All of them different in color and pat-
tern,

Silk, muslin, and lace, crape, velvet, and
satin,

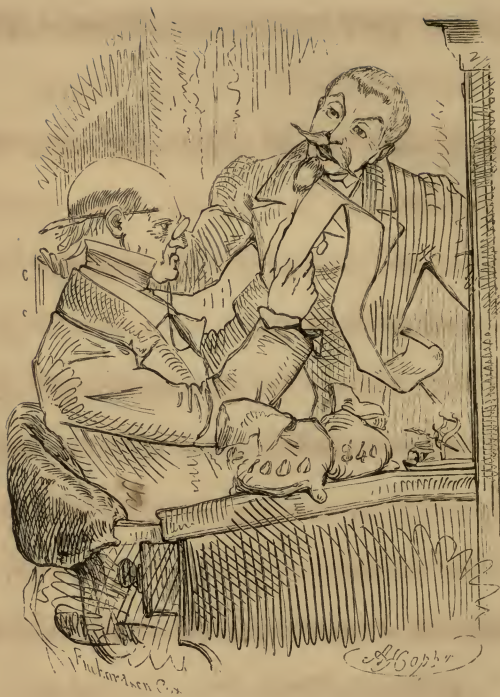
Brocade, and broadcloth, and other ma-
terial,

Quite as expensive and much more ethereal;

In short, for all things that could ever
be thought of,

Or milliner, modiste, or tradesman be
bought of,

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From ten-thousand-francs robes to twenty-sous frills;

In all quarters of Paris, and to every store,

While M'Flimsey in vain stormed, scolded, and swore,

They footed the streets, and he footed the bills.



The last trip, their goods shipped by the steamer Arago

Formed, M'Flimsey declares, the bulk of her cargo,

14 Nothing to Wear.

Not to mention a quantity kept from the
rest,

Sufficient to fill the largest sized chest,
Which did not appear on the ship's
manifest,

But for which the ladies themselves mani-
fested

Such particular interest, that they invested
Their own proper persons in layers and
rows

Of muslins, embroideries, worked under-
clothes,

Gloves, handkerchiefs, scarfs, and such
trifles as those ;

Then, wrapped in great shawls, like Cir-
cassian beauties,

Gave GOOD-BY to the ship, and GO-BY to
the duties.

Her relations at home all marvelled no
doubt,

Miss Flora had grown so enormously stout

For an actual belle and a possible bride;

But the miracle ceased when she turned
inside out,

And the truth came to light, and the
dry goods beside,

Which, in spite of Collector and Cus-
tom-house sentry,

16 Nothing to Wear.

Had entered the port without any en-
try.

And yet, though scarce three months
have passed since the day

This merchandise went, on twelve carts,
up Broadway,

This same Miss M'Flimsey, of Madison
Square,

The last time we met, was in utter de-
spair,

Because she had nothing whatever to
wear!

Nothing to Wear. 17

NOTHING TO WEAR! Now, as this is a
true ditty,

I do not assert—this, you know, is
between us—

That she's in a state of absolute nu-
dity,

Like Powers' Greek Slave, or the
Medici Venus;

But I do mean to say, I have heard
her declare,

When, at the same moment, she had
on a dress

Which cost five hundred dollars, and
not a cent less,

And jewelry worth ten times more, I
should guess,
That she had not a thing in the wide
world to wear!

I should mention just here, that out of
Miss Flora's
Two hundred and fifty or sixty adorers,
I had just been selected as he who
should throw all
The rest in the shade, by the gracious
bestowal



Nothing to Wear. 21

On myself, after twenty or thirty rejections,
Of those fossil remains which she called
“her affections,”
And that rather decayed, but well-known
work of art,
Which Miss Flora persisted in styling
“her heart.”
So we were engaged. Our troth had
been plighted,
Not by moonbeam or starbeam, by fountain or grove,
But in a front parlor, most brilliantly
lighted,

22 Nothing to Wear.

Beneath the gas-fixtures we whispered our
love.

Without any romance, or raptures, or
sighs,

Without any tears in Miss Flora's blue
eyes,

Or blushes, or transports, or such silly
actions,

It was one of the quietest business tran-
sactions,

With a very small sprinkling of senti-
ment, if any,

And a very large diamond imported by
Tiffany.

On her virginal lips while I printed a
kiss,

She exclaimed, as a sort of parenthesis,
And by way of putting me quite at my
ease,

“You know, I’m to polka as much as
I please,

And flirt when I like—now stop, don’t
you speak—

And you must not come here more than
twice in the week,

Or talk to me either at party or ball,
But always be ready to come when I
call;

24 Nothing to Wear.

So don't prose to me about duty and
stuff,

If we don't break this off, there will be
time enough

For that sort of thing; but the bargain
must be

That, as long as I choose, I am per-
fectly free,

For this is a sort of engagement, you
see,

Which is binding on you but not bind-
ing on me."

Well, having thus wooed Miss M'Flimsey and gained her,

With the silks, crinolines, and hoops that contained her,

I had, as I thought, a contingent remainder

At least in the property, and the best right

To appear as its escort by day and by night:

And it being the week of the STUCKUPS' grand ball—

Their cards had been out a fortnight or so,

26 Nothing to Wear.

And set all the Avenue on the tip-
toe—

I considered it only my duty to call,
And see if Miss Flora intended to go.

I found her—as ladies are apt to be
found,

When the time intervening between the
first sound

Of the bell and the visitor's entry is
shorter

Than usual—I found; I won't say—I
caught her—

Intent on the pier-glass, undoubtedly
meaning



The first part of the history is a general account of the

state of the empire at the beginning of the reign of the

emperor, and the progress of the war during the first

years of his reign. The second part is a particular

account of the battles and sieges which were fought

during the course of the war. The third part is a

concluding chapter, in which the author gives a

To see if perhaps it didn't need cleaning.

She turned as I entered—"Why, Harry, you sinner,

I thought that you went to the Flashers' to dinner!"

"So I did," I replied, "but the dinner is swallowed,

And digested, I trust, for 'tis now nine and more,

So being relieved from that duty, I followed

Inclination, which led me, you see, to your door.

30 Nothing to Wear.

And now will your ladyship so conde-
scend

As just to inform me if you intend
Your beauty, and graces, and presence
to lend

(All which, when I own, I hope no
one will borrow),

To the STUCKUPS', whose party, you know,
is to-morrow?"

The fair Flora looked up with a pitiful
air,

And answered quite promptly, "Why

Harry, mon cher,

I should like above all things to go

with you there;

But really and truly—I've nothing to

wear."

"Nothing to wear! go just as you

are;

Wear the dress you have on, and you'll

be by far,

I engage, the most bright and particular

star

32 Nothing to Wear.

On the Stuckup horizon"—I stopped,
for her eye,

Notwithstanding this delicate onset of flat-
tery,

Opened on me at once a most terrible
battery

Of scorn and amazement. She made
no reply,

But gave a slight turn to the end of
her nose

(That pure Grecian feature), as much
as to say,

"How absurd that any sane man should
suppose

That a lady would go to a ball in the
clothes,

No matter how fine, that she wears
every day!"

So I ventured again—"Wear your crim-
son brocade,"

(Second turn up of nose)—"That's too
dark by a shade."

"Your blue silk"—"That's too heavy;"

"Your pink"—"That's too light."

"Wear tulle over satin"—"I can't en-
dure white."

34 Nothing to Wear.

“Your rose-colored, then, the best of the batch”—

“I haven’t a thread of point lace to match.”

“Your brown moire antique” — “Yes, and look like a Quaker;”

“The pearl-colored”—“I would, but that plaguey dress-maker

Has had it a week”—“Then that exquisite lilac,

In which you would melt the heart of a Shylock.”

(Here the nose took again the same elevation)

“I wouldn’t wear that for the whole of creation.”

“Why not? It’s my fancy, there’s nothing could strike it

As more comme il faut—” “Yes, but, dear me, that lean

Sophronia Stuckup has got one just like it,

And I won’t appear dressed like a chit of sixteen.”

“Then that splendid purple, that sweet Mazarine ;

That superb point d’aiguille, that imperial green,

36 Nothing to Wear.

That zephyr-like tarleton, that rich greenadine”—

“Not one of all which is fit to be seen,”

Said the lady, becoming excited and flushed.

“Then wear,” I exclaimed, in a tone which quite crushed

Opposition, “that gorgeous toilette which you sported

In Paris last spring, at the grand presentation,

When you quite turned the head of the head of the nation;



And by all the grand court were so
very much courted."

The end of the nose was portentously
tipped up,

And both the bright eyes shot forth in-
dignation,

As she burst upon me with the fierce
exclamation,

"I have worn it three times at the least
calculation,

And that and the most of my dresses
are ripped up!"

Here I ripped out something, perhaps
rather rash,

40 Nothing to Wear.

Quite innocent, though; but, to use
an expression

More striking than classic, it “settled my
hash,”

And proved very soon the last act of
our session.

“Fiddlesticks, is it, Sir? I wonder the
ceiling

Doesn't fall down and crush you—oh,
you men have no feeling,

You selfish, unnatural, illiberal crea-
tures,

Who set yourselves up as patterns and
preachers.

Your silly pretence—why what a mere
guess it is!

Pray, what do you know of a woman's
necessities?

I have told you and shown you I've
nothing to wear,

And it's perfectly plain you not only
don't care,

But you do not believe me" (here the
nose went still higher).

"I suppose if you dared you would call
me a liar.

Our engagement is ended, Sir—yes, on
the spot;

42 Nothing to Wear.

You're a brute, and a monster, and—I
don't know what."

I mildly suggested the words—Hotten-
tot,

Pickpocket, and cannibal, Tartar, and
thief,

As gentle expletives which might give
relief;

But this only proved as spark to the
powder,

And the storm I had raised came faster
and louder,

It blew and it rained, thundered, light-
ened, and hailed

Interjections, verbs, pronouns, till language
quite failed

To express the abusive, and then its ar-
rears

Were brought up all at once by a tor-
rent of tears,

And my last faint, despairing attempt at
an obs-

ervation was lost in a tempest of sobs.



Well, I felt for the lady, and felt for
my hat, too,

44 Nothing to Wear.

Improvised on the crown of the latter a
tattoo,

In lieu of expressing the feelings which
lay

Quite too deep for words, as Words-
worth would say;

Then, without going through the form
of a bow,

Found myself in the entry—I hardly
knew how—

On door-step and sidewalk, past lamp-
post and square,

At home and up stairs, in my own easy
chair;



Nothing to Wear. 47

Poked my feet into slippers, my fire
into blaze,

And said to myself, as I lit my ci-
gar,

Supposing a man had the wealth of the
Czar

Of the Russias to boot, for the rest
of his days,

On the whole, do you think he would
have much to spare

If he married a woman with nothing to
wear?

Since that night, taking pains that it
should not be bruited

Abroad in society, I've instituted

A course of inquiry, extensive and thorough,

On this vital subject, and find, to my
horror,

That the fair Flora's case is by no means
surprising,

But that there exists the greatest distress

In our female community, solely arising
From this unsupplied destitution of
dress,

Whose unfortunate victims are filling the
air

With the pitiful wail of "Nothing to
wear."

Researches in some of the "Upper Ten"
districts

Reveal the most painful and startling
statistics,

Of which let me mention only a
few:

In one single house, on the Fifth Ave-
nue,

Three young ladies were found, all below
twenty-two,

Who have been three whole weeks with-
out any thing new

In the way of flounced silks, and thus
left in the lurch

Are unable to go to ball, concert, or
church.

In another large mansion near the same
place,

Was found a deplorable, heart-rending
case

Of entire destitution of Brussels point
lace.

In a neighboring block there was found,
in three calls,

Total want, long continued, of camels'-
hair shawls;

And a suffering family, whose case ex-
hibits

The most pressing need of real ermine
tippets;

One deserving young lady almost un-
able

To survive for the want of a new Rus-
sian sable;

Another confined to the house, when it's
windier

Than usual, because her shawl isn't In-
dia.

Still another, whose tortures have been
most terrific

Ever since the sad loss of the steamer
PACIFIC,

In which were engulfed, not friend or
relation

(For whose fate she perhaps might have
found consolation,

Or borne it, at least, with serene resig-
nation),

But the choicest assortment of French
sleeves and collars

Ever sent out from Paris, worth thou-
sands of dollars,

And all as to style most recherche and
rare,

The want of which leaves her with
nothing to wear,

And renders her life so drear and dys-
peptic

That she's quite a recluse, and almost a
sceptic,

For she touchingly says that this sort of
grief

Can not find in Religion the slightest
relief,

And Philosophy has not a maxim to
spare

54 Nothing to Wear.

For the victims of such overwhelming
despair.

But the saddest by far of all these sad
features

Is the cruelty practised upon the poor
creatures

By husbands and fathers, real Bluebeards
and Timons,

Who resist the most touching appeals
made for diamonds

By their wives and their daughters, and
leave them for days

Unsupplied with new jewelry, fans, or
bouquets,



Even laugh at their miseries whenever
they have a chance,

And deride their demands as useless ex-
travagance ;

One case of a bride was brought to my
view,

Too sad for belief, but alas! 'twas too
true,

Whose husband refused, as savage as
Charon,

To permit her to take more than ten
trunks to Sharon.

The consequence was, that when she got
there,

58 Nothing to Wear.

At the end of three weeks she had
nothing to wear,

And when she proposed to finish the
season

At Newport, the monster refused out
and out,

For his infamous conduct alleging no
reason,

Except that the waters were good for
his gout;

Such treatment as this was too shocking
of course,

And proceedings are now going on for
divorce.

But why harrow the feelings by lifting
the curtain

From these scenes of woe? Enough, it
is certain,

Has here been disclosed to stir up the
pity

Of every benevolent heart in the city,
And spur up humanity into a canter
To rush and relieve these sad cases in-
stanter.

Won't somebody, moved by this touch-
ing description,

Come forward to-morrow and head a sub-
scription?

Won't some kind philanthropist, seeing
that aid is

So needed at once by these indigent
ladies,

Take charge of the matter? or won't

PETER COOPER

The corner-stone lay of some splendid
super-

Structure, like that which to-day links
his name

In the Union unending of honor and
fame;

And found a new charity just for the
care

Nothing to Wear. 61

Of these unhappy women with nothing
to wear,

Which, in view of the cash which would
daily be claimed,

The Laying-out Hospital well might be
named?

Won't STEWART, or some of our dry-
goods importers,

Take a contract for clothing our wives
and our daughters?

Or, to furnish the cash to supply these
distresses,

And life's pathway strew with shawls,
collars, and dresses,

62 Nothing to Wear.

Ere the want of them makes it much
rougner and thornier,

Won't some one discover a new Cali-
fornia ?

Oh ladies, dear ladies, the next sunny
day

Please trundle your hoops just out of
Broadway,

From its whirl and its bustle, its fashion
and pride,

And the temples of Trade which tower
on each side,



Richardson

Atropis

Nothing to Wear. 65

To the alleys and lanes, where Misfortune and Guilt

Their children have gathered, their city have built;

Where Hunger and Vice, like twin beasts of prey,

Have hunted their victims to gloom and despair;

Raise the rich, dainty dress, and the fine broidered skirt,

Pick your delicate way through the dampness and dirt,

Grope through the dark dens, climb the rickety stair

66 Nothing to Wear.

To the garret, where wretches, the young
and the old,

Half-starved, and half-naked, lie crouched
from the cold.

See those skeleton limbs, those frost-bit-
ten feet,

All bleeding and bruised by the stones
of the street;

Hear the sharp cry of childhood, the
deep groans that swell

From the poor dying creature who
writhes on the floor,

Hear the curses that sound like the
echoes of Hell,

Nothing to Wear. 67

As you sicken and shudder and fly
from the door;

Then home to your wardrobes, and say,
if you dare—

Spoiled children of Fashion—you've no-
thing to wear!

And oh, if perchance there should be a
sphere,

Where all is made right which so puz-
zles us here,

Where the glare, and the glitter, and
tinsel of Time

68 Nothing to Wear.

Fade and die in the light of that region
sublime,

Where the soul, disenchanted of flesh
and of sense,

Unscreened by its trappings, and shows,
and pretence,

Must be clothed for the life and the
service above,

With purity, truth, faith, meekness, and
love ;

Oh, daughters of Earth ! foolish virgins,
beware !

Lest in that upper realm you have no-
thing to wear !



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